DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 385 163 FL 023 179

AUTHOR Schaub, Mark
TITLE Cross-Cultural Dialogics: Bakhtinian Theory and Second Language Audience.
PUB DATE [Mar 95]
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of Conference on College Composition and Communication (Washington, DC, March 23-25, 1995).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cultural Context; *Dialog Journals; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Intercultural Communication; Journal Writing; Second Language Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Bakhtin (Mikhail); Egypt

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the possible impact of Bakhtinian theory concept in English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instruction. Bakhtin views on the culturally and politically embedded nature of language and addressivity and answerability are ideal for discussion of cross-cultural communication. His cultural and political context are inseparable from an utterance, content, style, and arrangement, and his discussion of "social and historical heteroglossia" replicates the building blocks of discourse, surrounded by layers of culture and author's voice. The Bakhtinian view of audience allows time to analyze current pedagogies and conceptions in a new light, such as through the use of dialogue journals and intercultural exchange of texts. The Bakhtinian audience process is illustrated by journals produced in a university class of Egyptian English learners. The journals differed from regular student journals in that the audience of the journal was not the teacher, but fellow students in other countries, such as during the Persian Gulf War, during which students primarily Arab and African wrote to American students. The Bakhtinian view sees all communication as cross-cultural; applicability in the ESL situation is even more appropriate. (Contains 28 references.) (NAV)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED 385 163

# Cross-Cultural Dialogics: Bakhtinian Theory and Second Language Audience

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Mark Schaub

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

FL 023179

Mark Schaub
Dept. of English
Purdue University
West Lafayette IN 47907
mschaub@vm.cc.purdue.edu

**Cross-Cultural Dialogics: Bakhtinian Theory and Second Language Audience**

During the past 20 years, the writings of Russian language theorist Mikhail Bakhtin have been applied in countless ways by theorists of all disciplines in which the use of language is a central concern. More recently, scholars in the fields of Rhetoric and Writing Studies have adopted Bakhtin as a theoretical foundation for their own understandings of, among other things, the social nature of language in writing. Likewise, those interested in Second Language writing and research have found insight in Bakhtin's views on *dialogics* and *utterances*.

At the same time, there has been increasing attention, in both Rhetoric and Composition (L1 writing and discourse) and in ESL writing, to many contemporary issues of audience, i.e. how writers conceive and adapt to various audiences for their texts, and what the concept of audience entails. Both Coney (1987) and Porter (1992) document numerous recent theoretical developments on audience in the study and teaching of writing. Though some ESL scholars, like Jones and Tetroe (1987), continue to ignore questions of audience in the composing process, many in the field of rhetoric now deal with at least the "social" aspects of audience in written communication (Porter, 1992, p.xii).

Even with this acknowledgement and application of Bakhtin's

theories to discussions of writing, there really hasn't been a thorough articulation, to date, of a particularly Bakhtinian understanding of audience issues for cross-cultural or second language writers. There is a dearth of published knowledge at the intersection of the Rhetoric and the ESL fields, and at the intersection of audience theories and Bakhtin's theories, a dearth which needs to be remedied if American writing teachers with students from various cultures and language backgrounds are to be theoretically equipped to teach audience from a position informed by the writings of M. M. Bakhtin. Readers of *Second Language Writing* can benefit from this Bakhtinian view of audience as it may allow them to analyze their current pedagogies and conceptions in a new light.

A few teaching techniques currently being used in writing classrooms of all types are especially useful and are highly compatible with Bakhtinian theory--among them, the use of "dialogue journals" and the inter-cultural exchange of texts.

Contemporary Writing Theorists and Bakhtin

In her 1990 article on audience, Louise W. Phelps points to Bakhtin's dialogic theory as a useful aid in thinking about the interaction of author and reader. In the same collection, Mangelsdorf, Roen, and Taylor (1990) examine how students writing in English as their second language conceive of audience while composing. They also direct writing teachers towards Bakhtin for a complex and theoretically sound description of how their

students appropriate the words and style of others, how this appropriation enriches the students' own writing.

Neither of these articles discuss Bakhtin specifically in terms of cross-cultural communication; the focus of each article is elsewhere. Phelps doesn't address her application of Bakhtinian theory and writing audience to second language writers. The Mangelsdorf, et al publication never completely examines the social implications of utterances and how ESL writers are in dialogue with other "cultures" each time they write in English. For Bakhtin, whose theories are most often read in terms of dialogues within one particular linguistic background, "culture" is manifested linguistically and is inseparable from our utterances (*Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 280-281). His unique discussions of the fully social aspects of words, utterances, language use, are ideally suited for such an understanding and pedagogy as I am calling for.

Simply stated, Bakhtin's views on the culturally and politically embedded nature of language make it perfect for discussion of cross-cultural communication. Likewise, the nature of Bakhtin's views of addressivity and answerability make his theories ideal for talking about audience. In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Bakhtin[1] writes that "The word is a territory shared by both addressor and addressee (p. 86). Not only is an author's cultural and political context inseparable from an utterance, content, style, and arrangement are

inseparable from it as well (*Speech Genres*, p. 60).

Furthermore, these building blocks of discourse, these utterances, are surrounded by countless layers of other voices (and layers of culture) within which the author's own voice (and culture) must sound (p. 278). Bakhtin calls this layering and appropriation of utterances "social and historical heteroglossia" (*Dialogic Imagination*, p. 272).

All of these highlights of Bakhtin's theories are central to the appropriation of Bakhtin's theories by those in the Rhetoric and Composition and the ESL fields.

## The Contemporary treatments of Bakhtin and writing

After breaking down some of the traditional notions of authorship and readership, Phelps calls for "powerful theories that not only elaborate a more comprehensive, fertile, and adequately complex understanding of language and writing as social, but also make it possible to recuperate boundaries among the aspects and influences on discourse as *heuristic* distinctions" (p. 165).

According to Phelps, Bakhtin's concept of *addressivity* as a language act "makes the addressee [the "reader"] a function of a speech genre" (p. 168). The audience, in a dialogue of utterances, thus becomes a discursive concept, in which the cultural, political (indeed, the social) background of potential readers can gain representation in the author's text, if that text is seen as an utterance addressed to a potential readership.

Though more theoretically grounded on discussions of audience than other publications on this issue, the Phelps and Mangelsdorf, et al, pieces are certainly not the first to apply Bakhtin to writing theory.

Five years earlier, Charles Schuster wrote an article in *College English* about how Bakhtin can be seen as a rhetorical theorist. He points out that, for Bakhtin, "Language is not just a bridge between the 'I' and 'Thou.' it *is* the 'I' and 'Thou'" (p. 598). Though Schuster's application of Bakhtin to writing takes a more general stance than Phelps's in not focusing on audience, it provides interesting analysis on how "Dialogism in language leads insistently to the aesthetic" (p. 602), meaning that there is an artistic element to utterances in dialogue, an element which is difficult to describe in traditional terms.

Zebroski (1989) and Himley (1991) also make unique applications of Bakhtinian theory to various aspects of the writing classroom. Zebroski focuses on how teachers can provide a Bakhtinian reading of student papers by looking for what traditionally might be seen as an expressivistic authorial "voice." Zebroski, though, tries to distance himself from Romanticism by using the term "voice" to refer to Bakhtin's "authentic self" (p. 36). Though he describes texts from a reader's point of view, Zebroski's article does little to shed new light on audience: audience as conceived in the minds of second language or cross-cultural writers.

Himley's (1991) article does relate more directly to second

language writers and audience in that she focuses on Bakhtin in writing assignments for children learning how to write in first languages--which in a Bakhtinian sense, also involves the appropriation of the utterances and culture of other(s).

Like Schuster, Himley points to language itself as the "hero" in discourse acts (p. 97), and seeks to find ways of helping see language as "a social, a shared territory." Her pedagogical applications of Bakhtin are sound; her writing classroom is geared towards student texts as utterances, as answerable units in a chain of utterances (p. 105), with the child writer as a "semiotic subject" (p. 106). In the chapter on Bakhtin, at least, Himley doesn't go into specific assignments in this kind of theoretically Bakhtinian pedagogy, but does point to emphasis on "the shared territory of writer, reader and language out of which all meaning emerges" (p.109).

Donald Brenneis's article (1986) also focuses on the discourse act as shared territory (in a Bakhtinian sense), and specifically looks at how through "indirection," an audience and a speaker make meaning together. Brenneis is concerned with all forms of communication in general, not just writing, but does provide a reading of how Bakhtin's theory on the shared territory of utterances can be used to show that "purely direct speech acts" cannot be taken at face value, with one inherent "meaning" (p. 345), but can be taken many different ways by primary or secondary audiences.

Edlund (1988) and Courts (1991) are two theorists within the

ESL or Literacy fields who try to make attempts at applying Bakhtinian theory to language acquisition. Though it receives cursory mention, Courts sees Bakhtinian language classrooms as places "becom[ing] transformed into the space in which dialogues occur and are examined" (p. 120). The subjects of student discussion in this kind of Adult literacy classroom, for Courts, are language itself, utterances themselves, and dialogics themselves. Students talk about these discourse acts to get a better sense of what it means to write, to use a language shared by so many others in similar yet individual ways.

John R. Edlund, in his 1988 article, conducts a rather exhaustive analysis of how dialogics of language can be seen in student texts. Edlund is particularly interested in the conflicts in ideology that occur when a student from, say, an Asian culture writes in an English classroom at an American university. Like Bakhtin, Edlund uses "ideology," to refer to that world of signs that exists both in the world and in the individual psyche, but is apparent within utterances (p. 58).

Edlund sees the writing classroom "as an attempt to hasten and direct the appropriation/assimilation process" (p. 61). The teacher in this kind of Bakhtinian writing class becomes, then, a mediator of authority in the dialogues students engage in so that their individual and various ideologies are not subsumed by an "alien" authority. Astute teachers must be able to also see the ideological and cultural conflicts evident in the student texts; Edlund provides such readings in this article.

. Though Edlund's enlightening article goes quite far in providing writing teachers with a way to read the texts of students from various cultures in a different way: to see certain grammatical and transitional problems as signs of intellectual and language development (p. 67), it also does not deal, in any detailed way, with student conceptions of readership while they compose.

Audience awareness in ESL writers

The role of audience and considerations of readers in the composing processes of second language writers has been increasingly explored by ESL scholars in the past 10 years but still remains an area needing more attention. In her discussion of the composing processes of advanced ESL writers, Zamel (1983) merely mentions that "some writers understood the importance of taking into account a reader's expectations" (p. 78).

In Scarcella's study (1984) comparing the audience awareness of native English writers with that of non-native writers, she concludes that the native English writers "were better able to predict their readers' personal characteristics, including interests, intelligence, and knowledge of the world. . . In many cases they knew exactly what was expected of them and how to deliver it. Indeed, they sometimes appeared to be able to tailor their essays to the particular interests of their readers" (p. 684). Unfortunately, Scracella doesn't extensively explore the reasons for these significant findings.

Raimes (1985) provides a study of beginning ESL writers in which she finds that two of three subjects never acknowledge a particular readership in their compositions (p. 239).

Though it doesn't mention Scarcella's study, Connor's article (1987) serves as an interesting companion to it. Connor's analysis of argumentative patterns in the writing, in English, by students of different cultures includes the finding that "there are no cultural differences with regard to audience awareness in composition. . ." (p. 66). Though this conclusion may be seen as contradictory to Scarcella's findings, the Connor study does in fact acknowledge that audience awareness was a "predictor of successful argumentation" (p. 66).

Tony Silva (1990) writes that more focused attention needs to be made, by ESL teachers and theorists, to the most important elements of second language writing, and includes among them, the cultural orientation, language proficiency and motivation of L2 writers, and also the nature of what is usually the primary audience for L1 writers, especially in academic settings: the L1 reader (p. 18).

There is ample evidence of Ann Johns' (1990) assertion that "audience theory as it appears in the L1 literature has generally been neglected in ESL" (p. 30). One example is Wallace's (1987) suggestions of how to teach audience awareness to ESL technical writers. His pedagogy is based on a fairly archaic "linear model" notion of audience. Johns briefly categorizes the L1 audience theorists into three schools: expressivist,

cognitivist, and the social constructionists (pp. 30-31).

An even more thorough survey of current L1 audience theories and how they can be applied to L2 instruction of audience awareness is provided in the Mangelsdorf, et al (1990) article mentioned earlier.

Cross-Cultural communicative issues

The hugely general term "cross-cultural", when referring to communicative issues, is an area in which countless articles and studies have been done, within the scope of the ESL field, the Rhetoric & composition field, as well as in Linguistics, Anthropology, and others. Some research, such as that by Johnstone (1986), focuses on differences in the rhetorical techniques commonly used by those with different cultural backgrounds, while others like Carroll (1988) explore communicative breakdowns from a sociolinguistic perspective.

Still other studies, like that of Hinds (1987) investigate the differences among cultures of responsibility for meaning. In his article, Hinds concludes that in some language cultures, like American English, the writer is "more responsible" in conveying the intended meaning, while in others, like Japanese, the reader is seen as having primary responsibility for accessing the author's intended meaning.

Tannen (1986) acknowledges that most research on cross-cultural communication is negative, in that it reports varieties of communicative breakdowns, but adds that there are articles

which give those interested in cross-cultural communications some slim optimism (pp. 149-150). One issue most of these countless articles have in common is that they can be seen as dealing with audience issues. Few, though, acknowledge this and talk about how writers may adapt to specific audiences, if at all.

One cross-cultural study which provides a specific pedagogical approach to this concern is Katriel's (1990/1991) article. In Katriel's writing classroom, which includes both Arabs and Israelis, he has the students conduct "sociolinguistic interviews" with one another about cultural reactions to various words and phrases. The new understandings students are usually able to reach ideally help them understand different ways different readers understand texts (pp. 201-202).

Halio (1989) provides includes some discussion of audience, focusing on the relationship of Style to readers' reactions to the texts of second language writers. Halio's pedagogy involves careful scrutiny of model texts by student writers, during which they pay careful attention to the ways in which the various authors seem to specify particular audiences in the texts. Another way in which Halio aids students to imagine different kinds of audiences is to invite guest speakers, usually non-Americans, to provide a variety of views, from different cultures, on topics which students read and write about.

In this cursory survey of research in cultural communication, it is apparent that there is indeed need for attention to specific audience concerns, as well as for a

Bakhtinian view of writing to audiences of other language and cultural backgrounds. Bakhtin, though, seems to see *all* communication as cross-cultural--all the more reason to provide teachers of second language writers with this kind of application of Bakhtin's theories.

The theory into practice

How, then, might ESL instructors, or any other teacher with students from a multiplicity of cultures, incorporate a Bakhtinian conception of audience into their classroom instruction? The simple answer is, they already do, and just might not know it.

Numerous Instructors of all levels and fields have been using "dialogue journals" for years, having students write their journal entries *to* them, the teachers, and then responding individually to each of the students. Peyton & Staton's (1993) entire book is a collection of different uses of dialogue journals for building language fluency and writing skills.

An approach that I've used with students both in the U.S. and in Egypt that is an effective application of a more inclusive view of audience is having students write directly to university-level writing students in other countries. In one particular instance--during the Persian Gulf War--my primarily Arab and African students at The American University in Cairo wrote directly to the primarily American students of a friend and colleague at a large public university in South Carolina. The

students wrote individual essays on their opinions towards the U.S. stand in the region. The American students wrote back individual responses to individual letters. The possibilities for this kind of essay or letter exchange--across continents--are limitless, once logistical avenues for such exchanges have been made.

## Note

1. I am taking the position of Clark & Holquist (1984) in citing *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* as the work of Bakhtin. They write: "...there is good reason to conclude that the disputed works were written by Bakhtin to the extent that he should be listed as the sole author. . ." (p. 147).

References

Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination.* Austin, TX: Texas University Press.

Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays.* Austin, TX: Texas University Press.

Brenneis, D. (1986). Shared territory: Audience, indirection, and meaning. *Text, 6*(3), 339-347.

Carroll, R. (1988). *Cultural Misunderstandings: The French-American Experience.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Clark, K. & Holquist, M. (1984). *Mikhail Bakhtin.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Coney, M. B. (1987). Contemporary views of audience: A rhetorical perspective. *The Technical Writing Teacher, 14,* 319-336.

Courts, P. (1991). *Literacy and Empowerment: The Meaning Makers.* New York: Bergin & Garvey.

Edlund, J. (1988). Bakhtin and the social reality of language acquisition. *The Writing Instructor,* 7(2), 56-67.

Halio, M. (1989, Fall). Writing for international readers. *College Teaching, 37,* 131-133.

Himley, M. (1991). Bakhtin: Language as hero in early language development. In Shared Territory: Understanding Children's Writing as Works, (pp. 91-109). New York: Oxford University Press.

Hinds, J. (1987). Reader versus writer responsibility: A

new typology. In U. Connor & R. Kaplan (Eds.). *Writing Across Languages: Analysis of L2 Text*, (pp. 141-152). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Johns, A. (1990). L1 composition theories: Implications for developing theories of L2 composition. In B. Kroll (Ed.). *Second Language Writing*, (pp. 24-36). Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

Johnstone, B. (1986). Arguments with Khomeini: Rhetorical situation and persuasive style in cross-cultural perspective. *Text, 6*(2), 171-187.

Jones, S. & Tetroe, J. (1987). Composing in a second language. In A. Matsuhashi (Ed.) *Writing in Real Time: Modelling Production Processes*, (pp. 34-57). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Katriel, T. (1990/1991). Learning/teaching about communication and culture: some reflections on research and pedagogy. *Research on Language and Social Interaction, 24*, 189-207.

Mangelsdorf, K., D. Roen, & V. Taylor. (1990). ESL students' use of audience. In G. Kirsch & D. Roen (Eds.). *A Sense of Audience in Written Communication*, (pp. 231-247). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Peyton, J., & J. Staton, Eds. (1993). *Dialogue Journals in the Multilingual classroom: Building Language Fluency Through Written Interaction*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.

Phelps, L. (1990). Audience and authorship: The disappearing boundary. In G. Kirsch and D. Roen (Eds.). *A Sense of Audience in Written Communication*, (pp. 153-174). Newbury

Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Porter, J. (1992). *Audience and Rhetoric*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Raimes, A. (1985). What unskilled ESL students do as they write: A classroom study of composing. *TESOL Quarterly, 19*, 229-258.

Scarcella, R. (1984). How writers orient their readers in expository essays: A comparative study of native and non-native English writers. *TESOL Quarterly, 18*, 671-687.

Schuster, C. (1985). Mikhail Bakhtin as rhetorical theorist. *College English, 6*, 595-607.

Silva, T. (1990). Second language composition instruction: developments, issues, and directions in ESL. In B. Kroll (Ed.). *Second Language Writing*, (pp. 11-23). Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

Tannen, D. (1986). Introduction [to special issue on cross-cultural communication]. *Text, 6*(2), 143-151.

Volosinov, V. [M. Bakhtin]. (1986). *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wallace, R. (1987). Teaching audience to advanced ESL technical writers. *Exercise Exchange, 33*, 19-21.

Zamel, V. (1983). The composing processes of advanced ESL students: Six case studies. *TESOL Quarterly, 17*, 165-187.

Zebroski, J. (1989). A hero in the classroom. In B. Lawson, S. Ryan, & W. R. Winterowd (Eds.). *Encountering Student Texts*, (pp. 35-47). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers

of English.